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Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

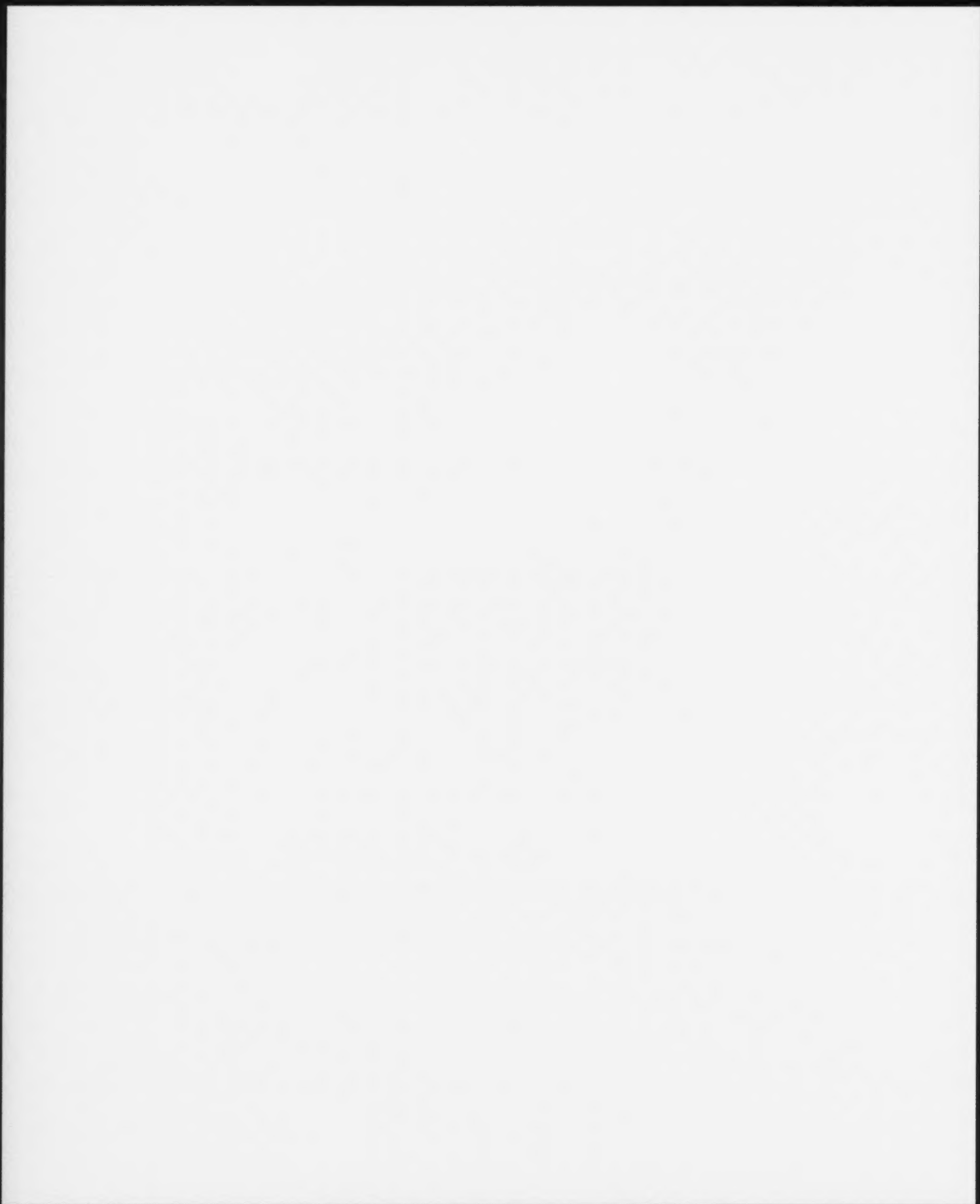
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Chair

Mr. Robert Oliphant



Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration

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• (1205)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.)):
Good morning, everyone.

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) regarding the main estimates 2018-19, today we are considering two areas of reference to our committee: vote 1 regarding the Immigration and Refugee Board, and subject matter on main estimates for the Department of Citizenship and Immigration.

I will just give you notice right now that at the end of the meeting when we come to a vote, we will only be voting on the main estimates with respect to the IRB vote 1 because the others were already referred to the committee of the whole and voted on last week.

Welcome again, Minister. Thank you for agreeing to appear before the committee, and the same to your officials, who are becoming well known to us.

Thank you as well, Deputy, for coming.

We'll move over to you for an opening statement.

[Translation]

Hon. Ahmed Hussen (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'm pleased to meet with you again this week, this time to discuss the 2018-2019 main estimates, as they apply to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada.

[English]

Joining me today are Marta Morgan, deputy minister; Chris Meyers, acting chief financial officer; Paul MacKinnon, assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; Mike MacDonald, associate assistant deputy minister, strategic and program policy; and Bruce Scofield, director general, immigration program guidance.

As the committee is aware, last week I appeared before the committee of the whole during which I spoke of the government's accomplishments, outlined current and future priorities, and addressed important questions from colleagues.

[Translation]

It was an opportunity to highlight both the valuable role that immigration plays to support our economy and the important

international humanitarian commitments we have to help those who come to Canada, seeking our protection.

[English]

It was also a chance to again discuss the challenges we face from issues such as irregular migration, as well as the decisive measures our government has taken to ensure the safety and security of Canadians. I will say more on this in a moment.

The IRCC budgetary main estimates for 2018-19 total more than \$2.35 billion. This represents a net increase of approximately \$708 million from the previous year's main estimates.

Allow me to outline some of the most significant components of this increase. To start, we're requesting funding of \$287.9 million to support the 2017 and the 2018 immigration levels plans. This is made up of two parts. In October 2016, the government established a new baseline for immigration of 300,000 permanent residents annually, starting in 2017. It provided additional funding of \$218.9 million in 2018-19 to achieve this target. As you know, in October 2017 the government built on this new baseline by approving a historic, multi-year immigration levels plan, which increases admissions to 310,000 in 2018, 330,000 in 2019, and 340,000 in 2020, which brings us very close to 1% of Canada's population. Additional funding of \$69 million was provided in 2018-19 to support this plan.

This funding will go towards bolstering our operational capacity as well as expanding settlement services to ensure that the newcomers we welcome are well supported on the path to integration and full participation in Canadian society. These investments reflect the government's recognition of immigration as a key driver of Canada's economic growth and contributor to our social and humanitarian objectives.

Next year, we are requesting a total of \$236.6 million from the accumulated surplus of the passport program revolving fund to address the forecasted drop in volumes and revenues expected in 2018-19. The passport program is currently in the middle of its 10-year business cycle, due to the introduction in 2013 of the 10-year passport option. Since most passport holders have opted for the 10-year passport, the revenues accumulated will be used to offset the forecasted drop in demand for passports, not only for this year and next year, but also for the remaining five years of the business cycle when fewer Canadians will need to renew their passports. The draw on the accumulated surplus will also allow the passport program to cover its anticipated costs and expenditures over the remainder of the business cycle.

As well, we request funding to cover increased transfers to Quebec, in the amount of \$112 million, related to the funding formula in the Canada-Québec Accord. The amount to be paid to Quebec to support settlement and integration services in that province is calculated annually under the terms of the accord. As committee members may be aware, the federal government does not fund Quebec service providers directly. We transfer funds—totalling \$490 million this year—to the Quebec government, which then decides how the money is used to support settlement and integration services in that province.

• (1210)

Finally, we request funds to cover increased funding for the interim federal health program totalling \$89.8 million. I'm proud that our government fulfilled our promise to Canadians to fully restore refugee health care. For example, this program is being used to support newly arrived Yazidis and other survivors of Daesh, including providing them with access to medical and mental health services.

In addition, I would like to mention some other funding increases we are requesting for IRCC. To expand biometric screening in Canada's immigration system, we request funding of \$28.1 million. To enhance procedural fairness in the citizenship revocation process, we seek funding of \$6.1 million. To strengthen the process for claiming asylum in Canada, also known as the ministerial reviews and interventions pilot project, we make a request of \$5.2 million. Finally, to regularize the reforms to the temporary foreign worker program, we request \$2.5 million.

Before closing, I would like to touch very briefly on irregular migration. As you know, our government is reinvesting into front-line operations to strengthen border security and speed up the processing of asylum claims. To that end, budget 2018 invested approximately \$174 million towards managing irregular migration. IRCC received \$17 million to support the asylum system, and the Immigration Refugee Board received \$74 million.

These funds will be used to staff 50 new decision-makers in the refugee protection division, and 14 new members in the refugee appeal division, for a total of 64. This will allow the board to finalize an additional 17,000 claims for refugee protection and more than 3,000 refugee appeals.

In addition to this, the IRB is introducing a new system based on proportionality that will restructure their internal operations to ensure claims are processed as quickly as possible. With the additional investments in budget 2018, and the ongoing collaboration with our various partners and within government departments, we've made significant progress in recent months on managing the situation effectively.

In closing, allow me to note I'm proud of what our government has accomplished so far in strengthening our immigration system, ensuring our policies support economic growth and job creation, respecting our international obligations, and furthering Canada's long-standing humanitarian traditions.

[Translation]

And I am confident we will continue to work with all partners to support newcomers and build the future of this country.

[English]

We would now be happy to take any of your questions.

[Translation]

Thank you very much.

[English]

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

We begin with Mr. Sarai, for seven minutes.

Mr. Randeep Sarai (Surrey Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Minister. We appreciate your comments.

There was concern in my riding of Surrey Centre when we were originally increasing the numbers that settlement services should be appropriately compensated equivalent to the increase in levels. I notice a 30% increase in the overall budget in the main estimates.

Can you explain the need for the increase, and does it correlate to the levels plan increase, i.e., more claimants equals more money needed?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: First of all, it's important to note at the outset that the asylum process is very different from the rest of our immigration streams. The asylum seekers are processed by the Immigration Refugee Board. Not every asylum seeker, obviously, has a legitimate claim for refugee protection. Those folks will be removed from Canada, and therefore they are not part of the mix.

Asylum seekers who are found to be in need of Canada's protection get to stay and are able to apply for permanent resident status down the road, but it takes a long time for them to be processed and then to become permanent residents. Once they become permanent residents, they will be able to access the settlement services that are open to other immigrants.

In terms of—

• (1215)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Is the increase in the overall main estimates due to the increased levels planned as well? So if we are increasing the number of permanent residents, are we're correlating the amount of—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes. Absolutely. In fact, that was the main thrust of the argument last year. As a government, we believe very strongly that if we are going ahead with an increase in the number of permanent residents we welcome into Canada every year—which is something that provinces, employers, and everyone was asking us for—we should have a corresponding increase in settlement funding to enable those newcomers to get the services and the supports they need, so they can succeed faster and contribute to Canadian society faster.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: And perhaps, as well, they'll be able to contribute more.

How does this correlate with the federal health program? Is the \$89-million increase due to some of the new programs that are included in the federal health act, i.e., that refugees will get the basic necessities of medical assistance, including preliminary dental, etc.? Is that what the increase is for?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes. I would also just remind the committee that it was our government that restored the program. The program was cut by the previous Conservative government, and we made a commitment to Canadians to restore that program because when the program was cut, the health care needs of asylum claimants or refugees did not disappear. They just ended up being borne by provinces and territories. We felt the federal government had to play its role and restore that program.

I'm proud that that program is now being used to support the most vulnerable, including the Yazidis and other survivors of Daesh who are accessing medical and mental health services because of the interim federal health program.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I understand that \$860 million is allocated for settlement programs and resettlement assistance. In the main estimates that's an increase of about \$77 million. Can you explain the programs that will be funded by this increase or any funding breakdown, i.e., LINC language training or other types of programs?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Yes. First of all, the overall increase reflects the fact that there will be many more permanent residents than ever before in Canadian history. The funding is distributed via open and transparent processes to over 500 settlement organizations outside of Quebec. In addition to that, we have an innovation fund that came into place after budget 2017 to encourage stakeholders in the settlement service-provider environment to test out new ideas to determine, for example, better ways to deliver language training outside of the classroom, by embedding language training in the workforce, for example, and more specialized services for subsets of permanent residents, such as refugee youth or vulnerable women and so on. That's part of that.

Budget 2018 also helped us with additional money to assist racialized newcomer women to transition into the labour market, because we know they've had a number of obstacles in their way as they have attempted to transition into the labour market once they've gotten into Canada.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I notice that there is \$179 million, almost \$180 million, for visitors, international students, and temporary workers. Surrey is home to many thousands of international students, and I'm glad to see there's that funding of \$180 million allocated to visitors, international students, and temporary workers.

Can you explain how the \$179.9 million will be spent among these three streams?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll have the deputy minister, Marta Morgan, answer.

Ms. Marta Morgan (Deputy Minister, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): That funding is our base funding in the department, which allows us to process temporary resident visas for all applicants who come in through all of those streams. It's split sort

of evenly among those streams, depending on volume. It's really volume driven, but the majority is for visitors because of the many visitors we have coming to Canada every year.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: Do we see a net increase in the number of visitors in the last three years? Do you have numbers on that?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We'd be pleased to provide those numbers. I don't have the exact numbers with me, but, yes, year over year, we're seeing significant increases in all of those categories, particularly visitors, for temporary resident visas. We've been in the 8% to 10% per year growth over the last number of years.

• (1220)

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My understanding is that the international students bring about \$11.5 billion to our economic stream, and I think in tourism we can notice about \$97 billion, almost \$100 billion.

Would it be fair to say that as we increase the number of visitors, the tourism industry also benefits from that?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely, and we are doing our part to enable Canada to attract even more tourists. I was in China last year to open an additional number of visa application centres because we recognize that 2018 is the Canada-China year of tourism.

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there.

Thank you very much.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Will the minister and his department please table with the committee the percentage of refusals from Venezuela, by year since 2015, for temporary resident visas, including student visas and work permits, as well as permanent resident visas, such as the federal skilled work category and the Canadian experience class?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I'm happy to provide those numbers to the committee.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Recently, we've heard that there has been a dramatic increase in the number of refusals of visas for Venezuelan visitors to Canada, as well as from other countries.

Is your department proactively refusing visas given the burden caused by the number of people illegally entering the country from the United States and subsequently claiming asylum in Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Visa decisions are made by independent visa officers who use their training and judgment to determine bona fide travellers. They make their decisions independently, free of political interference.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I recently had a woman in my office who regularly has her family visit Canada from Venezuela. Her sister wanted to come to Canada to see her niece graduate. Despite the fact that nothing has changed in her situation, her application to visit Canada was recently denied. The factor that was cited on her application was "other". That "other" was that the visa officer felt that due to the deteriorating political and social climate in Venezuela, she would not return home.

How is this compatible with the Lima declaration that Canada signed earlier this year, stating that Canada would help with cases of migratory accommodations and identity documents for Venezuelans?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Before I answer that question, I want to deal with the previous point the honourable member made. Asylum seeker processing has absolutely no impact on the regular migration streams processing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: So I'm asking—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Secondly, I'm answering the question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No, you're not answering my question, actually. You're answering the question that you would like to answer, so I will state my question again.

We have seen visa denials increase from other countries with the rationale, as I just said, that due to the deteriorating climate, there is a reasonable fear that people would not return home.

I am wondering, first of all, if this is compatible with the declaration that Canada has signed regarding the humanitarian situation in Venezuela, and if the minister has put forward any sort of directive to deny visas from countries where there may be concerns of increased asylum claims.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's very difficult for a member of a government that muzzled bureaucrats and media to understand that we respect our civil service.

An hon. member: Oh, come on; don't go there.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We understand that our visa officers make independent decisions. That's what we expect them to do, and that's what they're doing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Again, my question has not been answered. I'm wondering if this particular directive is in alignment with the Lima statement that was signed on May 21, 2018.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: What directive?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The Lima statement that was put in place on May 21, 2018, which says—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm not asking about the statement. I'm asking about the ministerial directive that you seem to know about and I don't.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I'm asking the minister—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I haven't made a directive.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: —given that there is a dramatically increased rate of visa refusals from Venezuela, if there has been any directive given to refuse visa applications from Venezuela.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Once again, we don't interfere in the decision-making process of independent civil servants and visa officers, and that is our position.

• (1225)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Given that Canada signed this declaration on May 21, 2018, and given that Canada has seen an increased number of visa refusals with the "other" category that I just mentioned, how is the minister going to square that circle?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: It's very easy: We don't muzzle our civil servants like you did when you were in office.

It's very simple: We believe that our visa officers make independent decisions.

An hon. member: That's no way to act, Minister. You're a minister; act appropriately.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Chair, I have a point of order on the decorum of the witness. I feel the witness is being somewhat unparliamentary in his aspersions, and I would call him to order.

The Chair: I would remind all the members that we will ask our questions as MPs, but the answers are those that are given by the witnesses. It is their responsibility to answer the questions as they feel fit.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you for maintaining decorum in such an appropriate way, Mr. Chair.

Would the minister please tell us the number of Romanian asylum claims that have been made since December 2017?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. MacKinnon will answer that question.

Mr. Paul MacKinnon (Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Since December 1, 2017, up until May 19, there have been 1,022 asylum claims from Romania.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Earlier this year, the department mentioned that there was a line, a number in which the minister would make a decision to reinstate the visa on Romania. What is that number?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: As I think I said last time on this question, the government is not sharing what that line is. There is a threshold in place, but out of respect for the relationship with Romania, the government is not releasing that threshold publicly.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: The department promised to deliver its review of the visa policy framework within this year. When will that be done?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We're looking at the policy framework. That should come forth within months.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Under a previous Conservative government, the metrics for visa-exempt status included metrics such as an immigration violation rate of less than 3% over three years, and a refugee claim rate of less than 2% of all asylum claims made in Canada. It now seems completely random as to which countries the government exempts.

Will the minister now provide this information to committee on how he is determining the removal of visa requirements from countries such as Romania and Mexico?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Under Canada's visa policy framework, the decision to lift or impose a visa is taken very seriously.

Countries are assessed both against—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to answer the question.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: I have limited time. Does the federal—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Countries are assessed against both a qualitative and a quantitative criteria such as border management—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Does the federal government have any plan to offset the cost to provinces for the change in medical inadmissibility for this?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: —travel document integrity, and trends related to irregular migration—

An hon. member: Point of order, Mr. Chair.

The Chair: I'll just remind everyone that it's hard for the interpreters. We need one person to speak at a time.

Ms. Rempel, you have the floor.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Yes, thank you.

The Chair: You have seven seconds.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Does the federal government have any plan to offset the cost to the provinces for the change in medical inadmissibility rules?

The Chair: Very briefly.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: There's an ongoing discussion with the provinces and territories on the issue of excessive demand.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Rempel.

Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan (Vancouver East, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the minister and his officials.

We have learned that the London, England, office of IRCC routinely sends out what they call procedural fairness letters to spousal sponsorship applicants. The language of those letters in my view is offensive and insulting. They question the merit of the marriage in such a way that in my view is inappropriate.

I raised this yesterday with the Prime Minister in the House of Commons, and I got gibberish as a response.

I wonder whether the minister can comment on this. Does he think that kind of language is appropriate?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Reuniting families continues to be a very top priority for our government. We've done a lot to improve the process of spousal sponsorship—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, Madam Chair; I'm going to interrupt here for a minute.

I have seven minutes for a question and response. I'm asking a direct question.

Does the minister think it is appropriate for the U.K. office to be issuing those kinds of letters to spousal sponsorship applicants?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We've made a lot of progress in terms of the spousal sponsorship process. At the same time, our department

continues to uphold measures to safeguard against marriage fraud and other program integrity risks.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Madam Chair, has the minister seen the letter that I'm referring to?

• (1230)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: No, I haven't seen that letter.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: It was included in the package that I handed to you yesterday after question period.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I just got it yesterday. My staff is looking at the package, and I—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if the minister will commit to looking at the material himself and not just rely on his staff.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Absolutely. I look at everything that comes to me from members of Parliament, but I first allow my staff to look —

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If the minister looks at that, he will see a copy of that letter. He will understand the inappropriateness of that letter. Frankly, in my view, it has a tone of racism to it. It is not appropriate to tell someone that they are not well matched, for example, because the wife is three years older than the husband. It is completely inappropriate to make those kinds of comments.

I would urge the minister to take a look at that and to look at the structure of the issue, and not just for this one particular case.

I would like to raise the issue of Iranian nationals. They too are stuck in this system, which both this minister and the Minister of Public Safety have acknowledged.

The minister was not able to provide a number to me as to how many people are stuck in this situation. Can he provide that information to me now?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We acknowledge that some applicants have experienced security screening delays and are working with our partners to process applications efficiently.

We have engaged with the community representatives on this—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, I'm asking a very specific question. How many people are stuck in the system, which has gone beyond the normal processing time for Iranian nationals? That was a question I asked of the minister at committee of the whole. I hope he has the answer now, today.

Ms. Marta Morgan: The Canada Border Services Agency reports that the current inventory of Iranians pending security screening under the temporary business lines is at approximately 4,150 cases, and the permanent resident inventory is at about 975 cases.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry. How many of them are beyond the normal processing time?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The processing times for security screening vary greatly, and some cases are particularly complicated depending on a number of factors. We would be happy to provide more information on this to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would like to get the specific breakdown. It's a question that I asked in committee of the whole and the minister could not answer the question. Surely—

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'll answer that question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Let me finish.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I'm trying to answer the question.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The minister now has the information, and his officials can provide this committee the information on how many people, Iranian nationals, are beyond the processing time in both the PNP stream and the express entry stream. It's basic information that I think the minister can provide to this committee.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Just to put it on the record, security screening is not conducted by IRCC. It's conducted by Public Safety. They would have the answer with respect to how many are beyond the normal processing time for security screening.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: The files are before this ministry. They are stuck in this ministry. While it's true that CBSA is doing the security screening, they are stuck in this ministry. So my question is, in the PR applications, how many Iranian nationals are beyond the normal processing time in the different streams to which they are applying?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The average processing time for Iranians is higher than that for the overall average processing time.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry—

Ms. Marta Morgan: At the moment, the average security screening processing time is 293 days for permanent residents from Iran.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'm sorry, but you need to compare the individuals who are Iranian nationals to other people, people who are not Iranian nationals. That's how you get the difference in the number of lengthy delays they are experiencing. Processing times for the Iranian nationals I've spoken with—there are hundreds of them—are somewhere between 300 to 1,200 times longer than those for people from other countries. That's what I'm asking for.

I don't want to spend any more time, and so, Madam Chair, could I get your direction to the ministry to provide that information to the committee?

Hon. Michelle Rempel: That sounds quite reasonable. I certainly hope that the minister and his department would do that, Ms. Kwan.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

I'm going to move on to another area. The minister himself just talked about visa applications in China particularly, given that this is the year of tourism between Canada and China. There was a Guangdong world conference that was held this week, and over 200 of the visa applicants in China, many of whom are individuals and officials who had been approved and allowed to come to Canada previously, were rejected. They are some of the organizers of this world conference and they were not able to come. Why is that?

• (1235)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: You can appreciate that I cannot comment on specific cases and the reasons for visa rejections. That's not—

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I do not believe it is just a specific case. Here you have a major world conference, over 2,000 people across the globe came for this event, and some of the organizers in China were not able to come from Guangdong province themselves, to attend the Guangdong conference. There were over 200 applicants, a number of them officials who had come to Canada before. Nothing has changed and they've been rejected. I think there is a systemic issue here and I would like the minister to look into that situation.

The Chair: Thank you.

I need now to move to Mr. Tabbara for seven minutes.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara (Kitchener South—Hespeler, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to let the minister finish. There was a question from the opposition. They're confused about the difference between visitor visas and asylum claims. I want to give you a chance to answer that.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much.

This is something we have been reiterating time and time again to the opposition, that asylum seekers are processed in a completely separate stream by the Immigration and Refugee Board, which is arm's length and judicial. The rest of the immigration system, whether it is overseas refugees we are bringing to Canada, spouses, family reunification, parents and grandparents, economic immigrants, express entry, provincial nominee program, or the start-up visa, everything else is processed by IRCC.

In those categories, we have an amazing track record. We have eliminated or dramatically reduced a lot of the backlogs that we inherited. We have dramatically decreased the processing time for a lot of those immigration streams, and we're proud of that record. To confuse the two and to make allegations of queue jumping or "this affecting that" is simply not the case. I'm happy you gave me this opportunity to clarify that once again.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: In terms of growing Canada's future economy, I want to talk a little bit about the immigration levels plan.

In 1971 there was a ratio of 6:1. That's six individuals working, and one retiree. In 2012, that was 4:1. In 2036 that's projected to be 2:1.

If we look at other G20 countries, we have aging populations. For example, Germany is at a median of 47; France, 41; Japan, 47; and Canada around 40-41. This is a cause of concern, because these countries are facing an aging population. To grow our economy and our population, immigration is essential.

With these numbers, an increased levels plan is essential to our economy. I believe our GDP in 2017 was \$1,652 billion. Part of that GDP growth is because of an increase in immigration.

Could you elaborate on the ratios and what we plan to do in the future to help grow our GDP, and ensure that we don't have the aging population that we're seeing on the east coast or in the rest of Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: That's a really important point to make.

The Conference Board of Canada has analyzed that without immigration the percentage of growth would drop by 0.6% of our GDP, which is pretty substantial.

In addition to that, when we arrived at the numbers we arrived at as a government, as you would know.... All of you were part of consultations that we did across the country to listen to employers, municipal government leaders, and other members of civil society. They asked repeatedly that we do two things. We should increase the number of permanent residents coming into Canada, and we should do it as part of a multi-year plan.

In the past we had one-year plans. The folks on the ground were saying to us that immigration is too important to have one-year plans. We have responded with a multi-year plan, a three-year plan that sees increases every single year.

That is precisely to respond to the real labour market and skills shortages that we have in Canada. The plan that we have in place responds in that manner. That's why 60% of that increase is in the economic categories of start-up visa, express entry, and the provincial nominee program. The provincial nominee program, which spreads the economic benefits of immigration across the country, will see a 33% increase over the life of this plan.

• (1240)

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Previously, we initiated the global skills strategy. It's helped a lot of individuals who were coming to Canada in areas of science, technology, engineering, and math. Immigrants now represent a significant portion of that, filling 50% of these spaces.

Can you elaborate on that, and also talk about the skilled trade areas, where there are still gaps in that field?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The global skills strategy is another program that we introduced last year, that came directly from employers. Employers were telling us that it was simply taking too long to get talent into Canada, and that we should streamline the process. We've delivered that engagement with the global skills strategy. It gets talent, and processes the work permit applications. In certain categories it has dropped that processing from seven months to two weeks.

In addition to that, researchers who are coming to conduct research at Canadian educational institutions or research institutes are exempted from obtaining a work permit. They can come for up to 120 days to conduct their research, collaborate with Canadian researchers and innovators, and then go back to their countries. Senior executives who come to do short-term leadership training or consulting can come for short periods of time without a work permit.

These programs are great, because they expose our research and innovation ecosystem to others. If they like what they see and have a good experience, they are then eligible to apply to stay permanently through the express entry system. We have made some changes to that as well, to encourage more international students, more francophone immigrants, more people who have siblings in Canada. Those changes are having an impact.

For example on the francophone side, we're seeing a doubling of the number of successful applicants coming through the express entry system, by some of the changes we made last year.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Minister.

Mr. Tilson, you have five minutes.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Part of the reason our former Conservative government had a visa for Romania was the concern that there was a hub for sex trafficking into Canada. Mr. Minister, what has your government done to ensure that visa-free travel is not being used to fuel the sex trafficking industry?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Under our visa policy framework, the decision to lift a visa or impose one on a country is taken very seriously. We assess countries against both qualitative and quantitative criteria such as border management, travel document integrity, and trends related to irregular migration in Canada.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, but what have you been doing, Mr. Minister, to ensure that this hasn't been happening?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We continue to monitor Romania against our visa policy framework. We already have established thresholds. We are exploring all options to mitigate the increase in asylum claims from Romania. As always, we reserve the right to reimpose a visa on a country should lifting it threaten the integrity of Canada's immigration system, or the safety and security of—

Mr. David Tilson: There have been reports, Mr. Minister, that sex trafficking is continuing. Have you had any more thoughts of putting a visa requirement back onto Romania so that this practice will stop?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Unfortunately, your question doesn't provide me enough specifics.

Mr. David Tilson: It's been in the media, Mr. Minister. There have been reports that sex trafficking continues from Romania into Canada. I'm sure you've read them or your assistants have read them. Therefore we would like to know what you intend to do.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Public Safety Canada leads the government's approach when it comes to human trafficking, as outlined in the national action plan to combat human trafficking, which is guided by the UN protocol to prevent, suppress, and punish—

• (1245)

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, have you discussed this with Minister Goodale?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are working with our Public Safety partners.

Mr. David Tilson: What are they saying?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would encourage you to—

Mr. David Tilson: You are the ones who put the visa on, so....

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As I said, sir, imposing or lifting a visa requirement goes through a comprehensive process. We have a comprehensive visa policy.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm aware of that.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I would encourage you to look at it.

Mr. David Tilson: It's going on. It's fine that Mr. Goodale may or may not have discussed this with you, but what are you going to do about it?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We are monitoring it closely.

Mr. David Tilson: One alternative is to put visas back on. I don't think Romania would like that, but what do you intend to do about it?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: As I said earlier, we are working very closely with Public Safety, which is the lead on this issue. We'll continue to do that.

Mr. David Tilson: Okay.

We'll try another one, Mr. Chairman. It's been reported that members of the notorious MS-13 gang are targeting the Canadian border to set up shop in Canada. What is being done to ensure that these criminals are denied entry into Canada?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Once again you're mentioning things that are not specific enough, but I will still answer the question to reiterate the importance of—

Mr. David Tilson: That's all I'm going to ask, Mr. Minister. You do your best. I'm waiting for the answer.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: We have a very rigorous security screening process at the border. Everyone who crosses our border is subject to very rigorous, comprehensive, and multi-layered security screening. We use biometrics and other databases that we share with our allies, to make sure we have a comprehensive view of who's coming into our country. Anyone who poses a risk to Canadian society is not released into our community. They're immediately detained and put into the removals stream.

Mr. David Tilson: How many of those who have crossed illegally into Canada since 2017 have filed asylum claims?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We would have to get back with those exact answers. However, our experience has been that the vast majority of those who have crossed have filed asylum claims, and—

Mr. David Tilson: Okay, I'd like to know the number. Could you give them to us, perhaps next week?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes.

Mr. David Tilson: You have them.

The Chair: Thank you; that's the end of your time.

If you could table those with the committee, that would be—

Mr. David Tilson: Well, he has an answer, Mr. Chair. Maybe he can give it to us now.

The Chair: I'm afraid you are over your time.

We go to Mr. Anandasangaree.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Minister, I first want to thank you and your colleagues. This will have been your third appearance in the last two weeks: four hours in committee of the whole last Thursday, one hour on Tuesday, and one hour today. I can appreciate the amount of work that is involved in preparing for this. I'm almost astonished that you are able to do other work while preparing to appear in front of this committee and the committee of the whole.

I want to pick up on Mr. Tilson's assertion. I would like you to comment on the dangers of generalizing. We often generalize based on minor incidents or one or two media reports. I think there is a danger in how Canadians take that, and I think it's irresponsible for parliamentarians to make those assertions. I'm wondering whether you could—

Mr. David Tilson: On a point of order, unless my colleague wants to get into a debate on this, he's casting aspersions as to—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I have the floor.

Mr. David Tilson: Well, you may have the floor, but I have the floor because I have a point of order, so you should settle down.

The Chair: I will determine whether it's a point of order.

Mr. David Tilson: I'm simply saying, Mr. Chairman, that he's casting aspersions on another member of Parliament with the questions he's asking, and if he wants to get into a debate, I'm pleased to do so.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I have the ability to ask the minister a particular question.

The Chair: I will determine whether it's a point of order.

Mr. David Tilson: Yes, but don't refer to me. I'll refer to you, but don't refer to me.

The Chair: I don't believe that's a point of order. It may be a point of privilege, but you asked for a point of order.

• (1250)

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you very much for that intervention, Mr. Anandasangaree. I completely agree with you that as we secure the safety and security of Canadians, we are also proud of the fact that we are a government, with Canadian support, that is ensuring that we meet our international obligation: that we have, as a country, to give due process to those who are claiming asylum.

Unfortunately, the party opposite has chosen, at certain points in their commentary, to make assertions around security that are completely unfounded. I will say that time and again, because the fact of the matter is that we have a very professional and rigorous security screening process that is multi-layered and that ensures that each and every one who crosses our border irregularly is processed and is subjected to a very rigorous security screening process that is able to ensure that not a single person who poses a security risk is released into our community.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, through you, both opposition parties appear to be fearmongering. I think that a number of assertions made in this committee would lead people to believe that Canada is insecure and also that there are illegal activities going on; that the fact of a person making a refugee claim itself is illegal. I find that to be quite problematic and quite irresponsible.

Minister, could you elaborate—?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I have a point of order, please.

The Chair: Miss Kwan has a point of order.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much.

It is inappropriate, I believe, Mr. Chair, for committee members to mislead the committee. At no time did I make any assertions about asylum seekers being illegal. At no time did I make any assertions about asylum seekers in any way skirting the security measures. I have always and consistently said that they follow exactly the rules as under Canadian law and that in fact they are not illegals. I would ask the member to withdraw that comment, wherein he referenced me.

The Chair: Could I ask the member to please reframe the question? Thank you.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Assertions are made, Minister, with respect to those who come to Canada, whether as visitors, as refugees, as immigrants. They cast aspersions on them and sometimes on their whole community and whole group of people.

Can the minister advise us how dangerous it is for us to be making those claims and generalizing, just based on one two incidents; how it affects our reputation, how it affects the ability of individuals from particular communities to live in this country equally and without indignity, without being chastised?

Mr. David Tilson: I have a point of order.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I believe I have a right—

The Chair: Points of order are allowed under the rules.

Mr. David Tilson: The comments that have been made, certainly by the Conservatives, and I expect by the New Democratic Party as well, have been made about those individuals who have crossed into Canada illegally, and the minister has acknowledged that those people are crossing illegally.

My colleague on the Liberal side is indicating we're casting aspersions on all those who were seeking asylum. He can't just make stuff up, and that's what he's been doing.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Tilson. I believe you're now engaging in debate. You may disagree with the member opposite. However, I would ask the member to continue. A vein of questioning would be helpful, I think, for the committee, as opposed to—

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Chair, I've asked a question. I'd like to get a response from the minister, please.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The first priority we have as a government is the safety and security of Canadians. That will never be compromised. Second, as a government we are proud to continue to meet our international obligations when it comes to asylum seekers, to make sure that those who claim asylum are given due process. They're given access to a fair hearing in front of the

Immigration and Refugee Board. Anyone who presents a risk to our country is detained and is not released into our community.

However, it's very dangerous to generalize and cast aspersions and smear an entire community, which is why, for example, in my travel to Nigeria as well as my engagements in Canada, I've made it very clear that the vast majority of people who come to this country come regularly. For example, Nigerian nationals form a large percentage of the successful applicants under express entry. They form a big percentage of those who enter through the provincial nominee program, international students, 6% growth in tourism, so again, we can't let the good work of—

• (1255)

The Chair: I need to end you there. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I'll make the point that my colleague was making. We have legally set-up border crossings in Canada, and we have points between them where there are no personnel. Once a person comes into Canada they are allowed to fill out forms for asylum in our country, but when they cross the border between those points, according to the safe third country agreement that we have, they cross illegally.

I'm wondering if the government can tell me now how many removal orders they've issued since the beginning of 2017 for these asylum seekers who have entered our country. Can they give us the number of illegal entrants?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Mr. Chair, I would encourage the honourable member to follow up that question with the Ministry of Public Safety, which is responsible for removals.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair, can the minister table the number of Romanian asylum seekers since December 1, 2017, broken down by age and gender?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: We can do that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can you make that available to the committee?

Mr. Chair, given the question I've just asked, I know the Minister of Immigration is working closely with the public safety minister. Has Public Safety never told him how many of these people have entered our country illegally, and how many removal orders they have had?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The issue of removals comes under the responsibility of Public Safety.

Mr. Larry Maguire: And you know nothing about it.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: The Minister of Public Safety was here on Tuesday testifying before this committee, and he offered to provide that information to the committee.

Mr. David Tilson: Don't you guys talk to each other?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Was that a question?

Mr. David Tilson: Yes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Mr. Chair, in his opening remarks the minister went on about the costs of different programs. I'm wondering if there's any other way to process the illegal border crossers in a more timely way, other than just hiring more people and costing more money.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Just hiring more people and just spending more money actually shouldn't be minimized; it is a tool. When you have more decision-makers, they can make more decisions and speed up the processing. I don't know what the honourable member's hostility is towards hiring more people to speed up cases.

On top of that, though, the Immigration and Refugee Board has conducted an internal exercise to improve its ability to finalize cases. They had already achieved a productivity growth of 40% before the investment we made as part of budget 2018. I believe the money that is pledged towards the IRB will result in more decision-makers and faster decisions on asylum claims.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Has the IRB determined what the extra cost will be for the fiscal year to deal with these illegal border crossers? Is it the number you gave us earlier, or have you determined exactly what it will be for this fiscal year?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: What I can tell you is that we are investing \$74 million in the Immigration and Refugee Board—

Mr. Larry Maguire: The same numbers you have in your document.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen:—in order to allow them to process thousands more cases than they were able to in the past. Part of the reason they will be able to do so is that they'll be able to hire 64 new decision-makers.

• (1300)

Mr. Larry Maguire: How many cases can each individual do in a year?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can tell you that the Immigration and Refugee Board, as part of the investments we have pledged as part of budget 2018, will be able to process 17,000 more cases than they're able to do at present.

Mr. Larry Maguire: How many of the 20,500 who crossed the border last year are still outstanding?

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I don't have those figures, Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: You don't.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: I can tell you what the investments will result in, which is far more cases—

Mr. Larry Maguire: Another way of asking that is, what is the backlog? How many are in the backlog?

The Chair: I'm afraid I need to end it there, but we can continue on this with the officials after the minister has left.

Mr. Whalen, you have just a couple of minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen (St. John's East, Lib.): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

We've had plenty of opportunity now—all parties have—to ask a number of questions on the estimates. There were a couple of little things we didn't get to.

I'd like to thank the minister for providing some insight into some of the increases in specific program and project funding, whether we anticipate them to be year-over-year or whether the funding will expire. I'm just going to focus on a couple of them: the \$5.2-million increase for the ministerial reviews and interventions pilot project, the \$2.5-million increase for reforms to the temporary foreign worker program, and the \$21-million increase for government-assisted refugees from Syria.

Are these amounts that we expect to be discontinued from the budget in the next fiscal cycle, or are these things that are going to be transferred to other projects or other categories of GAR?

Mr. Christopher Meyers (Acting Chief Financial Officer, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): With respect to the temporary foreign workers, the \$2.5 million is part of our ongoing funding going forward, so it is now permanent funding.

With respect to the Syria dollars, there is a reference in the main estimates to a decrease of about \$58.1 million in funding, which represents the gradual decline in the delivery of the Syrian initiative. That funding will continue into 2020, and then fall off as that cohort integrates into Canadian society.

The ministerial reviews and interventions funding is also part of our permanent ongoing funding on a go-forward basis.

The Chair: I think we're going to end there. I'm going to suspend the meeting for a moment. Mr. Whalen will begin the next round with a few minutes to finish his five minutes, then Ms. Kwan will follow, and then we'll go back to the start. This gives the minister a chance to go to prepare for question period.

We'll suspend for two minutes, again with our thanks for your appearance, and the officials will continue until about five minutes to two o'clock. Thank you.

Hon. Ahmed Hussen: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I think I should get a special chair, since I keep coming back to the committee.

The Chair: Okay.

• (1300)

(Pause)

• (1305)

The Chair: We're going to reconvene.

Mr. Whalen, you have just over three minutes left. It's over to you.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Great.

I'll go back to the estimates with respect to the increased funding for biometric screening. Could the departmental officials provide us with some information on that project? I'm wondering whether the standards being adopted are international multilateral standards; how it interfaces with the biometric screening that happens, for instance, in Africa by the UNHCR for the asylum program; and whether there will be good integration on the refugee side as well as the visa and immigration side on these new electronic tools.

Ms. Marta Morgan: As you may be aware, the government already uses biometrics extensively in our visa programs in order to ensure identity. The biometrics that are collected can be used to confirm identity, for security screening processes, and in our work with international agencies.

The project here is really to expand the use of biometrics. This is an ongoing project for which we've been receiving funding over a number of years. We see biometrics as really a key element of our visa system and our immigration system, now and in the future, as we move forward.

Mr. Nick Whalen: As well, there seems to be an internal transfer from operating funding to capital funding on the technology side. Does that also relate to the biometrics, or is that relating to other IT initiatives that are ongoing in the budget? How does this relate to the government's overall information technology plan?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: I can speak to the numbers. Within the capital vote, which totals \$21.8 million, the amount of \$1.3 million is dedicated to the biometrics project specifically. That relates to information collection and verification solutions within the global case management system, which is the software in the system that's used by the department to handle its processing-related activities. That's included within the \$21.8 million that you see in the capital vote.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Much of our capital expenditures is devoted to IT, because IT, particularly our GCMS, is really the platform for our operations. Everything we want to do, whether it's to improve client service or whether it's vis-à-vis processing and identity management, will all require IT investment. That's a really critical part of our operational footprint, and is key to our smooth functioning as a department.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, you have three minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Could the staff advise on whether or not the consultation process with the caregivers has been completed?

• (1310)

Ms. Marta Morgan: The consultation process is currently under way. We have undertaken a number of consultations with 125 relevant stakeholders. We've had calls and invitations for written submissions.

Certainly, if there's any more information that the committee or its members wish to provide us on caregivers, we would be happy to receive it. Our formal consultation process is largely complete, given the number of people we have already met with.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: When do you expect an announcement to be made?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I can't give an exact time on that. We are actively looking at this. The government has been very clear about maintaining pathways. We really need to review the programs and take into advisement all of the input we've received.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: How many caregivers were rejected within the last year under the medical inadmissibility provision?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I do not have that data at hand. I would be happy to see if it's available. If we have that breakdown, I would be happy to table it with the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would ask for that information to be tabled at the committee, then.

I'm interested in knowing exactly how many people who would otherwise qualify were rejected, most recently within the last 12 months, under the new rules, and where, as a result of the long time in processing, if they make a new application under the new rules, whether it be in H and C or in the other stream, one or more of their children would have aged out. Can you provide that information to the committee, please?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes, we would be happy to provide that information to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

How many international students have become permanent residents since the changes to the express entry program?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Since the changes to the express entry program, the proportion of individuals invited to become permanent residents has increased substantially. It's now in the range of between 30% and 35%, I believe, of the total draw. I don't have the exact figure since the change at my fingertips, but there has been a significant increase since the changes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I wonder if you can provide that information, with the exact number, to the committee, and I would like to have it broken down by country of origin. Then, aside from how many people have been invited to submit an application, who has been successful with the PR application, and how does that compare with the previous year?

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Kwan.

We're now going to enter the third round, and we'll go back to seven-minute rounds.

We'll begin with Mr. Whalen.

Before we do that, I want to remind the committee of this. You may not know it, but there are officials from the IRB, Immigration and Refugee Board, in the gallery. Should you have questions that you feel are not departmental questions but rather IRB questions, they are willing to answer them. The deputy also has that information.

Mr. Whalen, you have seven minutes.

Mr. Nick Whalen: That was a timely intervention, Mr. Chair, because my next question is around the long-term planning for the finances of the IRB and managing their volume of work for irregular border crossings. It seems last year there was certainly a very high number with Manitoba and Quebec. This year it looks to be the... It's questionable as to what will happen with Nigerian immigration on the Quebec border, but all expectations are that there'll be a large number.

At a certain point in time, what's considered irregular and unusual will become normal and expected. I want to get a sense, in terms of reviewing the estimates, of how solid we are on the numbers and the amount of support that's being given to the IRB this year. At what point in time will this not be extraordinary funding, but will just become part and parcel of the annual funding envelope for the IRB?

If you could explain to the committee members the process of migration of moving from special funding to part of the overall general annual envelope, that would be helpful for us.

Ms. Marta Morgan: In this budget, budget 2018, the government allocated \$74 million over two years for the IRB to enable faster decision-making on asylum claims. As the minister noted, this will enable decisions on an additional 17,000 claims and enable the IRB to add 64 new decision-makers.

I think that any decisions regarding future funding would be taken in future budgets. Clearly, there is a recognition that the number of asylum claimants continues to be high this year, and the IRB is a critical part of the asylum system in terms of providing fair and efficient processing of those claims. This is something that would need to be considered in future budgets.

The existing budget includes \$74 million over two years for that purpose.

• (1315)

Mr. Nick Whalen: I guess a follow-up question to that would be, are these positions for two-year contract positions? Is it expected they will be permanent full-time positions but, with a general churn, an overall turnover of employment within the IRB, that a sufficient number of positions will be eliminated after two years? Maybe that's something we've asked in previous other contexts, but in the budgetary context, I think it's more important.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, I would ask for a representative from the IRB to answer that question, as they are actively in the process of staffing these positions.

The Chair: I welcome you to the table again.

Mr. Thomas Vulpe (Assistant Deputy Chairperson, Refugee Protection Division, Immigration and Refugee Board): I'm Thomas Vulpe. I'm the acting deputy chair for the refugee protection division.

The positions that are being hired for presently to fulfill the budget funding envelope are term positions only.

Mr. Nick Whalen: I guess I'll turn the question back to you.

At what point in time, then, will you make decisions? What's the framework under which you'll make decisions about requesting that these temporary positions become full-time positions? Is there a threshold number of backlogs at which you will come back to us and say, "We need this \$77 million over two years to continue indefinitely into the future"?

Mr. Thomas Vulpe: The IRB is in discussions with the department on our long-term funding requirements, given the levels of intake and referral of claims to the board. These are ongoing discussions at the present time. As I say, we're hiring for two-year terms based on the funding envelope that we have been provided.

Certainly we continue to express the needs of the board in terms of funding to meet the full intake of refugee claims.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Are you saying, then, that you're already at the point where you feel that these need to be full-time positions, or are you waiting to see what happens this summer?

Mr. Thomas Vulpe: Whether we think they're full-time or not is mostly a question of proper stewardship in terms of only hiring term persons with temporary funding. At the present time, we're hiring with temporary funding and filling the term positions.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Maybe I'll try to ask that question another way, because I've asked it four times now. What's the overall framework under which you would make a determination that you need this funding to be long-term? Is there a threshold or a backlog, or are we already there? It's a question that the opposition has asked, and I'm also interested in knowing. We're asking to approve estimates for temporary funding, but we're starting to get to the point where we want to understand whether or not it's a permanent need. That's a legitimate question, and that's five times now.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We continue to work with the IRB to determine the ongoing needs of the organization in light of the ongoing trends in asylum claimants. Clearly, within the last year, there has been a significant increase in the number of asylum claims. That's why the budget provided two years of funding, and we continue to assess the needs going forward. They will be considered as part of ongoing government decision-making processes, including next year's budget. We are working very closely with the IRB on assessing what the needs are, and the whole asylum system, given the large increase in volumes that we have seen over the past year.

Mr. Nick Whalen: Okay, I'll ask again.

What's the framework under which these decisions are being made? As parliamentarians, when we see you guys at estimates (A), estimates (B), and estimates (C) asking for additional changes as money, it's difficult for us to understand the logic behind the requests if we don't understand the framework in which the request is being made. It seems to me that there must be a tipping point at some point in time, when the backlog will render the need for these positions to be permanent, and it's a question that's come up not just today, but almost every time we've had the IRB here.

I'd just like to understand the framework and the thresholds at which the need is considered permanent.

• (1320)

Ms. Marta Morgan: We obviously need to look at the overall trends in the asylum claims, what they're expected to be going forward, the ability to hire and train, and how quickly all of that can happen, so there are a number of factors that need to be considered, in addition to the overall budget decision-making process, about when is the right time to do that. Clearly that's something we work very closely with the IRB on.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Rempel.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

How many privately sponsored refugee applications are currently in the processing backlog?

Ms. Marta Morgan: The inventory for PSR cases at the moment is about 43,252 persons, which includes 15,884 groups of five and community sponsors.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is that backlog likely to be cleared by the end of 2019?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We are working very hard to reduce the backlog. The multi-year immigration levels plan has provided for 57,000 privately sponsored refugees over the next three years. That will enable us to reduce the backlog and lower processing times to 12 months.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many privately sponsored refugee applications are anticipated to be in the queue for processing at the end of 2018?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would have to provide that information. That is a projection that I do not have with me at the moment, but we are planning to welcome 18,000 privately sponsored refugees this year and 19,000 next year.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many IRCC staff have been reallocated or moved to process various components of applications related to people who have illegally crossed the border into Canada from the United States and have subsequently made asylum claims?

Ms. Marta Morgan: While we reallocated a modest number of staff last year in order to assist us with the increased volume of asylum claims, this year we did receive funding in the budget that allows us to backfill those positions. We do not foresee any impact on other lines of business.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What was the modest number of staff?

Ms. Marta Morgan: I'll let Mike MacDonald answer that.

Mr. Mike MacDonald (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Strategic and Program Policy, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): Last year we reallocated just over 160 staff to work throughout the busy summer period. This year there is no reallocation necessary, as was stated.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Are those 160 staff back on their regular lines of processing, or are they still processing the claims of illegal border crossers?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: No, they're back to their regular duties. There is no backlog of eligibility claims.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: No...so the 160 staff who moved, where did they go? Who is processing the claims now?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: The individuals who worked last year were working in Complexe Guy-Favreau, downtown Montreal, and they were working through the eligibility decisions that we had. All of that work is completed, and those staff have all migrated back to their regular duties.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Who is doing the processing for illegal border crossers?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: We now have regular staff who work out of Complexe Guy-Favreau because that has become a more permanent type of processing area. In addition we have the mobile units processing staff at Lacolle when necessary.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many staff were hired to process the claims of illegal border crossers?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: We backfilled the positions over time through a variety of staffing measures, so that's the 160 plus. That is now part of our regular workforce.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: So how many staff are now processing the claims of illegal border crossers?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: We have just over 60 individuals working explicitly on the border issue.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many staff currently work to process the claims of privately sponsored refugees?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We'd be happy to provide that information to the committee. Those staff are spread throughout our various networks internationally and domestically. We'd have to see if we even separate them out because most of our staff do multiple processing jobs with privately sponsored refugees. At some times of the year they focus more on the temporary visa side, and at some times of the year they focus on other permanent lines of business.

• (1325)

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How many staff process applications for permanent residency, let's say for live-in caregivers?

Ms. Marta Morgan: While we separate out some of our budget lines that way, our staff, again, tend to be multi-faceted, so they process different things at different times of the year depending on volume and that sort of thing.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Okay. How many total staff are allocated to process, let's say, all lines of permanent residency?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We would be happy to provide that information. I don't have it at my fingertips.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: A ballpark.

Ms. Marta Morgan: I don't have the exact breakdown at my fingertips. I'd be happy to provide that afterwards. Again, our staff, particularly overseas—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Just for time, Ms. Morgan. The assertion was made that 160 staff is a modest amount. I'm trying to contextualize that particular characterization.

Ms. Marta Morgan: By way of comparison, in the business line of immigrant and refugee selection and integration, our planned full-time equivalence for 2018-19 is 2,701. That is for immigrant and refugee selection and integration.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Thank you.

In the estimates, there is a line.... There is \$350,000, a grant for migration policy development. What third parties are involved in this, and how much money is going to each of them, and what is it?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The migration policy development program is a grant program that funds various partners in the area of international migration policy development and research. The final tally, if you will, of all the partners that will be funded in 2018-19 has not yet been finalized. That's an ongoing budget amount that we have.

I can give you a sense of what was—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Which third parties are being funded?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: Last year, as an example, we funded organizations such as the International Organization for Migration, the Migration Policy Institute, International Catholic Migration, UNHCR—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: What's the deliverable out of that?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: Those organizations advance key Canadian priorities in terms of migrants and refugees and also allow the partnering with key international organizations.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Is it like a document? What's the deliverable?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: It's research and policy advice.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: When have you used that?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair—

The Chair: Be very brief.

Ms. Marta Morgan: —our relationships with these organizations are very useful to us. We—

Hon. Michelle Rempel: How?

Ms. Marta Morgan: —get from them important analytical information about other trends in the world that might affect our programs and about what other countries are doing. They engage in conversation and discussion with other countries that bring people together on these issues globally.

The Chair: I need to end it there.

As the chair, I would like to clarify something that I was trying to get from Ms. Rempel's questioning that kind of went over my head. I want to make sure we get this right. The government side might not like this.

We have a backlog of privately sponsored refugees right now of 43,250—about that, is what you said. That's in the system; 18,000 for this year, 19,000 for next year. That's 37,000, which means 5,000 that are in the system now still won't get in under these levels until 2020. You will be receiving applications in those three years, I'm assuming, from Canadians who want to sponsor. Do I have this correct?

• (1330)

Ms. Marta Morgan: Yes, Mr. Chair.

This program has been very enthusiastically subscribed by Canadian organizations, and we have an inventory [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] applications that it will take a number of years for us to process. We have capped the applications for sponsorship agreement holders in this year in order to ensure that we don't get too many applications, so that we can process the applications that we have. There's a balance between taking new applications and processing what's already there.

The Chair: I just think the public needs to know this, because I have people in my riding—groups, churches, mosques, and synagogues that want to bring people in—and it's difficult. I think our committee is going to need to figure that one out.

Thank you for that questioning.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: On a point of clarification, Mr. Chair, I would note that the Honourable Bob Rae did table a report saying that Canada should increase its sponsorship of Rohingya refugees through the PSR program.

The Chair: We get that.

Ms. Kwan, you have seven minutes.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you very much. Mr. Chair.

Along those lines, how many people are in the one-year window of opportunity backlog at the moment, or how many applications?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We would propose to come back to the chair with that information.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Could you also provide information on how long you expect for that backlog to be processed?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Do you mean the backlog of one-year window?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: That's correct.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We will provide that information to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Speaking of backlogs, can you confirm that recently there was a backlog reduction office established in Niagara for caregivers?

Mr. Bruce Scofield (Director General, Immigration Program Guidance Branch, Department of Citizenship and Immigration): I can say that, in fact, we have had for a number of years what we call a backlog reduction office in Niagara Falls, as well as others in Montreal and Vancouver. These do different lines of work, including processing humanitarian and compassionate applications. As for the office in Niagara Falls, I would have to confirm whether it's processing live-in caregivers at this point, but there is an office there.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: If you can provide that information, then perhaps you can provide to the committee what it's set up to do, which are the streams, and then for the caregiver stream, how many it is targeted to process in terms of the backlog and where the files are coming from, where they transferred from in terms of that processing.

Ms. Marta Morgan: I would like to note to the committee that the live-in caregiver inventory is now below 12,000, and we expect to meet our commitment of processing 80% of the existing inventory by December of 2018.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I would still like that information about the Niagara office, if I may.

Along those lines, could I also get the detailed information, the breakdown of how many people in the backlog have been stuck in the system as a result of their spouse having served in the military or the correctional services or the police, or in some situation like that, and as a result of that, their case is delayed in processing?

Ms. Marta Morgan: If we have that breakdown, we will provide it to the committee. I'm not sure that we keep track of things in exactly that way, but we will do our best.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: I'd even like broad numbers, particularly those where their security checks are not being processed. I have cases in my office where it's more than 10 years, and they're still waiting. It's not reasonable to anticipate that a person's security measure is not somehow cleared after 10 years. I don't know what else can be done. I know CBSA, but still, I'd like to know how many people are stuck in the system.

Ms. Marta Morgan: We'd be happy to provide that information. As I noted, we do expect to meet our commitment of processing 80% of the existing inventory by December 2018, which should take care of the vast majority of these cases, but certainly there are some cases that are more complicated than others.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, thank you, but the outstanding cases are important, too. Always just saying you've done a lot is not acceptable when we have these ones, and it almost sounds like they don't matter.

On the issue around fees, we know that, with the passports, there's been over \$1 billion collected in fees since 2013 that's sitting in an account right now. The minister just said that \$250-some million will be allocated for this year's budget towards passports. Does the ministry have a projected plan on when that \$1 billion will be spent?

Ms. Marta Morgan: When the 10-year passport was introduced, it was recognized that, in the first five years of that 10-year passport, the passport program would accrue surpluses, but that, in the last five years of those 10 years, as people had 10-year passports and therefore, the amount of renewals went down, those surpluses would be used to cover the cost of those last five years. This is the first year you see that happening, so that's why you see that increase against passport, but it really is a reduction of the net revenues of the program, because renewals have gone down now that we're in the second of those five years.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Yes, with the exception that the hike in the fee has resulted in a surplus, and that surplus has been accumulating year after year to the point now that the surplus is at \$1 billion, which is a significant amount of money. It makes a person wonder whether IRCC should be re-evaluating the fee itself. Along those lines, I'm interested in this as well.

What is the actual cost to the government to process citizenship applications, work permit applications, study permit applications, permanent residence applications, and family reunification applications, and how much in fees are being collected for each of those streams?

• (1335)

Ms. Marta Morgan: Our fees are published, and we would be happy to provide them to the committee.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Sorry, not the fee itself, but rather the total amount of fees that's being collected under each of those streams.

The Chair: The revenue, I think.

Ms. Marta Morgan: The revenue. On an annual basis?

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Correct.

Ms. Marta Morgan: That information is available, and certainly we can provide it.

I would just note that the passport program is just entering the second half of its business cycle, so we are starting to see the drop in business demand and revenues that was expected, so while there is a surplus at the moment, we expect that surplus to be drawn down over the next five years.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Okay, we will look and see whether or not that's, in fact, the case, because there are a lot of low-income people. When you have to pay an upfront fee of that amount, they can't afford it. Seniors on a fixed income cannot afford it. A family cannot afford it. It means that it's debilitating for them, and I hope that people can appreciate the impact of that.

On May 14, 2018, IRCC notified the B.C. government that the visa office in Manila, Philippines, suspended the processing of applications related to the inter-country adoption files from Japan. Apparently there were concerns around this.

I'd like to get some further elaboration on what those concerns are. When can we expect this issue to be resolved?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: It's true that in May of this year, the federal government became aware, along with the Government of British Columbia, that a number of proposed adoptions that were being arranged by a particular intermediary in Japan may not be in compliance with Japanese law. At that point, working with British Columbia, we began to investigate the situation. We have been requesting clarification from the Government of Japan, and while this investigation is going on, we have suspended the processing of a small number of applications.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Tabbara.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you to all of you for being here today.

Immigrants now represent a significant portion of highly skilled labour, filling 50% of the STEM field—science, technology, engineering, and math. We're doing a good job there, but we still have a shortage in the skilled trades.

Is there any initiative to look at filling those types of jobs, with any estimates?

Ms. Marta Morgan: There are a variety of streams under which economic immigrants can enter Canada, including the federal express entry program, which does have the opportunity to do draws for skilled trades when there is sufficient demand.

Provincial nominee programs also provide significant opportunities for those in the trades. We see a lot of those kinds of workers coming to Canada permanently that way.

Also, for example, there is our new initiative, the Atlantic immigration pilot, where we're working closely with employers to bring in the employees who those employers need, and have them become settled as permanent residents.

Finally, I would just note the temporary streams where, if there are needs for skilled labour and trades on a temporary basis, there are a variety of ways for them to come in as temporary workers as well.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Just to add on that, the global skills strategy has brought in people very successfully. It's been a successful stream. Through the point system, however, those in skilled trades oftentimes may not meet the full point system because of the way it's structured. You get certain points if you have a certain degree, or a master's, etc.

If someone has been skilled in a trade for many years and is proficient in English or French, but may not have the educational background, do they not meet those requirements? Are we helping them out with the point system, or is it making it more difficult?

• (1340)

Ms. Marta Morgan: There are opportunities within the express entry system to do draws for skilled trades. Under the express entry system there is a skilled worker program, the Canadian experience class, and a federal skilled trade program. We do draws for skilled trades to come in through that program.

Also, as I noted, many of the provincial nominee programs do have a significant portion of their selections come in as skilled trades and others, particularly where there are existing jobs and connections to the labour force in the local community.

Mr. Marwan Tabbara: Thank you.

For my final question, the main estimates indicate a \$37-million decrease in the government's response to the Syrian crisis. Is this decrease due to the fact that Syrian refugees are now integrating into Canadian society, so there is no longer the cost there was when they first arrived in Canada?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, as part of the resettlement assistance program, we provide significant upfront assistance in terms of income support and also services to resettle refugees. Then, as they have been here for a little while, they transition into regular settlement services. As the Syrian refugees have now been here for a number of years, that funding is decreasing. However, the overall level of funding for our settlement and integration services is increasing, and the Syrian refugees will be able to—and already are in fact—taking advantage of all of those services as well.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Maguire, you have five minutes.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I see in some of the information the minister left us that there is \$112 million for the Canada-Québec Accord and \$490 million this year to the Quebec government for service providers. Can you just outline, for a bit of clarity, if that's an accumulated amount?

And then I think there is close to \$90 million for the interim federal health program. Can you just elaborate a bit more on that?

If you add all of that up, it's pretty close to \$700 million, so I just wonder if I'm reading that correctly.

Ms. Marta Morgan: Mr. Chair, this year's main estimates include an increase of \$112 million for the Canada-Québec Accord, and that makes a total of \$490 million to be provided to the Government of

Québec. It is provided for the settlement and integration services that the Government of Québec provides for new immigrants, similar to what the federal government provides throughout the country through service provider organizations.

Then, with respect to the IFH increase, I'll turn the question over to Chris Meyers to walk you through the numbers.

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The \$89-million increase in the interim federal health program represents the department's assessments of net new need this year to address increased volumes and increased numbers of users in the program. It's what's termed a quasi-statutory program. There's a defined set of benefits based on the number of users, which drives the amount that is sought subsequently in the estimates documents—that \$89.8 million.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you.

Is part of this to catch up on some of the backlog? Just for clarity, is the \$112 million in the Québec accord part of the \$490 million, or is it added to it?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: The \$112 million in the Canada-Québec Accord is the difference from last year to this year. The \$490 million represents the baseline amount for this year. It's the total amount the government will pay, at least based on what we know as of today.

Each year there are subsequent adjustments to that amount based on the underlying formula in the accord, and they're driven by two factors. The first factor is the growth, year over year, in federal expenditures in percentage terms. The second factor is the growth in non-francophone immigration into Quebec. Combined, those drive the growth in the formula.

• (1345)

Mr. Larry Maguire: Can you provide me with a breakdown of the interim health program with respect to the health services it provides?

Mr. Christopher Meyers: I have some information here that I could table with the committee.

Mr. Larry Maguire: It would be great if you could perhaps table it. Thank you.

I noticed as well that there's a biometrics increase here of \$28.1 million. I know there are the eyes being examined as well, but this mainly must be to do with the number of fingerprints that are taken from illegal people crossing the border or immigrants coming into the country in total—or is this just for the illegal refugees?

Ms. Marta Morgan: This is for the overall immigration program, Mr. Chair. Biometrics is a key element of our identity management, and as we move forward to expand it more broadly, we've been working on both the IT and implementation around it.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Is there a storage bank that those fingerprints go into when people are crossing the border?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: When either the CBSA or IRCC collects biometrics, we work very closely with the RCMP, which is the expert for the Government of Canada in the assessment of things such as fingerprints. It also holds the fingerprint records on behalf of the other agencies.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Would they have fingerprints from all regular immigrants coming into the country, then, or are these maintained mainly for illegal immigrants?

Mr. Bruce Scofield: At present, the Government of Canada collects fingerprints from all refugee claimants and has been doing so since 1993. We also collect fingerprints from the citizens of some 30 countries, on a pilot basis, who have applied to us to come as temporary residents. We are in the midst of a project to expand the biometric program, as the deputy minister mentioned. It will eventually encompass all applicants who come to Canada as permanent residents as well as most who come as temporary residents.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Sarai, you have five minutes. This may be our last questioning before we have a vote on our estimates.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My question is in respect to ETA, the electronic travel advisory. Maybe I missed it, but I don't see that there has been any increase of funding for those processing electronic travel advisories, particularly for an increase in officers for when one is flagged, for whatever reason. I have constituents who have friends or relatives coming from European countries, and whenever a name match or something happens, they are flagged and are held back for three, four, or five weeks.

I was hoping there would be some funding to process those name matches or mistaken queries.

Ms. Marta Morgan: There is no additional funding allocated in this year's main estimates for eTA processing. The approval rates for eTAs is 99%, and the vast majority of applications are processed within minutes. That said, we do realize that when those eTA applications fall out, it takes a little more time, although we normally try to have those processed within two to three days.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: My next question is on the passport program revolving fund. Are passport fees not in the general revenue? Is this the expenditure for the cost of processing them?

Ms. Marta Morgan: Passport fees go into the passport revolving fund, and then the fees are utilized to pay for the cost of the passport program, including capital and operating costs.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: I'm a little concerned that you're anticipating a decrease as a result of the 10-year passport, which I agree with. But I assume, and I think it's a safe assumption, that in the next couple of years we'll have an increase in citizens who will require new passports because of our reduction in the citizenship requirement from five years to three. I assume that in the next two years there will be a surge of new citizens who would not have been eligible before. In addition, it's now easier for those who are 55 and over who perhaps were hesitant to take the test due to the language requirements, because they're now not required to do so.

Would there not be an increase in passports on that front, which would perhaps make it necessary to have more funding for them?

• (1350)

Ms. Marta Morgan: We will be closely watching that. Clearly, we have had a big surge in applications for citizenship with the change in the legislation. Should that increase result in an increased demand for passports, we will be able to adjust. I think one of the advantages of having a revolving fund is that resources can be deployed very quickly in order to adjust to operational requirements.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: How much of an increase has there been since last fall? I've heard about an increase, but is there a number on that?

Mr. Paul MacKinnon: I can say we've had a high volume of applications for proof of citizenship. The average annual intake was 55,000 over the past five years. I'm trying to see what the overall increase is.

We might have to come back to you with that, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Randeep Sarai: If you could table that, it would be great, or if you get it in the next minute or so, that would be fine.

My next question is in terms of settlement agencies and LINC funding. I still hear from time to time in my riding of Surrey Centre that English-language training has a wait time—three months or more. Originally, it was eight months. I don't believe it's that long.

Is there more funding now for English-language training in this budget? What wait times do you see nationally?

Ms. Marta Morgan: We continue to work to reduce wait times. We created nearly 10,000 new language training spaces. We don't really measure wait times on a national basis, because they are so local. It really does depend on the locality.

We spend about 36% of our total settlement funding on language training, and one of our priorities this year is improving the way we manage and track wait times as well as seeking continual reductions in those. It's certainly something we have heard about. It's clearly a priority for immigrants to get into language training when they arrive here.

The Chair: I think I need to stop you there.

We've really come to the end, but I'll just look around to see if someone has one more minute....

Mr. Maguire and Ms. Kwan, I'll give you each a minute.

Mr. Maguire.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In 2017 the IRB saw that record number of asylum claims at 47,000. It jumped to almost 49,000 on March 31 of this year.

Mr. Vulpe, what are the current wait times for IRB hearings to be scheduled for new applicants? If I could follow up on that, what's the current refusal rate for the Nigerian applicants?

Mr. Thomas Vulpe: The average current processing time is approximately 20 months for claimants to be seen by the board. In terms of the acceptance rate for Nigerians, it's at around 40%—32% for the border crossers.

Mr. Larry Maguire: This is my last one, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Goodale made an announcement at a press conference a couple of weeks ago that 90% of those crossing illegally in 2018 have no legitimate asylum claim and will see their application to stay fail.

Do you believe this to be accurate?

Mr. Thomas Vulpe: The IRB doesn't comment on statements made in public. All our decision-makers are independent and make their decisions based on the merits of individual cases.

Mr. Larry Maguire: Then can any panellist answer as to whether that is accurate?

Mr. Mike MacDonald: Chair, I believe the minister's comment was related to the Haitian approval and rejection rate that is currently being experienced at the IRB, which is around 10% acceptance.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Kwan, you have a minute.

Ms. Jenny Kwan: Thank you.

Given that there's only one minute, I wonder if I could have the officials table for the committee how much funding is allocated to the SWIS program? This is the settlement workers in schools program. Was there an increase in the SWIS program in budget 2018? If so, what is that breakdown? Can we get that budget allocation broken down province by province and community by community—that is to say for Vancouver, Surrey, or whatever? How does this figure compare to that for previous years since 2014?

The other issue I would like to get clarification on is the question around Iranian nationals. How many Iranian nationals are above and beyond the processing time in the EE, the PNP, and the Quebec skilled workers program in comparison to the processing time for other applicants from other countries in the same stream? If I could get that comparison broken down by country of origin I would appreciate that.

Last, on the question around the Japanese adoption issue, I suspect there's not a large number, but a number of those cases have made their way to my office and I'm curious to know how many of those cases are in fact impacted as a result of this holding pattern while the investigation needs to take its course.

I'm not suggesting that we shouldn't do the investigation. Of course we should and we want to make sure that adoptions are done properly and that there are no issues of human trafficking or anything like that, but I would like to know how many people are impacted. Then, can we get a projected timeline for when this would be resolved so that I can at least provide that information to the people?

• (1355)

The Chair: We'll leave that with you, deputy. Do the best you can on those requests.

Thank you for your appearance today.

We're going to move to a quick vote.

Just before you leave, I want to thank the deputy, particularly for support from the department regarding our trip that's happening next week. As you know, we are going to be looking at visa processing in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania and some refugee issues, as well as refugee issues in Uganda. We've had a number of people who have supported us well already, and we'll report on how well they survive our trip.

Thank you.

Before we adjourn, we have to vote.

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE BOARD

Vote 1—Program and expenditures.....\$118,949,994

(Vote 1 agreed to on division)

The Chair: Shall I report the main estimates 2018-19, less the amount from the interim estimates, which were handled at committee of the whole, to the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

The Chair: Last is a note that my hope is to report this to the House tomorrow. We know that routine proceedings have been disturbed. I just want your approval that that if I am not able to do it tomorrow, a member of the committee who is not travelling with the committee can do it next week.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Chair: All right. Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.





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